

The Getae lamented, and Hebrus, and Attic Orithyia.
 Orpheus, sick to the heart, sought comfort of his hollow lyre:
 You, sweet wife, he sang alone on the lonely shore,
 You at the dawn of day he sang, at day's decline you.
 The gorge of Taenarus even, deep gate of the Underworld,
 He entered, and that grove where fear hangs like a black fog:
 Approached the ghostly people, approached the King of Terrors
 And the hearts that know not how to be touched by human prayer.
 But, by his song aroused from Hell's nethermost basements,
 Flocked out the flimsy shades, the phantoms lost to light,
 In number like to the millions of birds that hide in the leaves
 When evening or winter rain from the hills has driven them —
 Mothers and men, the dead
 Bodies of great-heart heroes, boys and unmarried maidens,
 Young men laid on the pyre before their parents' eyes —
 And about them lay the black ooze, the crooked reeds of Cocytus,
 Bleak the marsh that barred them in with its stagnant water,
 And the Styx coiling nine times around corralled them there.
 Why, Death's very home and holy of holies was shaken
 To hear that song, and the Furies with steel-blue snakes entwined
 In their tresses; the watch-dog Cerberus gaped open his triple mouth;
 Ixion's wheel stopped dead from whirling in the wind.
 And now he's avoided every pitfall of the homeward path,
 And Eurydice, regained, is nearing the upper air
 Close behind him (for this condition has Proserpine made),
 When a moment's madness catches her lover off his guard —
 Pardonable, you'd say, but Death can never pardon.
 He halts. Eurydice, his own, is now on the lip of
 Daylight. Alas! he forgot. His purpose broke. He looked back.
 His labour was lost, the pact he had made with the merciless king
 Annulled. Three times did thunder peal over the pools of Avernus.

[Lines 462-492]

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"Who," she cried, "has doomed me to misery, who has doomed us?
 What madness beyond measure? Once more a cruel fate
 Drags me away, and my swimming eyes are drowned in darkness.
 Good-bye. I am borne away. A limitless night is about me
 And over the strengthless hands I stretch to you, yours no longer."
 Thus she spoke: and at once from his sight, like a wisp of smoke,
 Thinned into air, was gone.

Wildly he grasped at shadows, wanting to say much more,
 But she did not see him; nor would the ferryman of the Inferno
 Let him again cross the fen that lay between them.

What could he do, where go, his wife twice taken from him?
 What lament would move Death now? What deities hear his song?
 Cold she was voyaging now over the Stygian stream.
 Month after month, they say, for seven months alone
 He wept beneath a crag high up by the lonely waters
 Of Strymon, and under the ice-cold stars poured out his dirge
 That charmed the tigers and made the oak trees follow him.
 As a nightingale he sang that sorrowing under a poplar's
 Shade laments the young she has lost, whom a heartless ploughman
 Has noticed and dragged from the nest unfledged; and the nightingale
 Weeps all night, on a branch repeating the piteous song,
 Loading the acres around with the burden of her lament.
 No love, no marriage could turn his mind away from grief:
 Alone through Arctic ice, through the snows of Tanais, over
 Frost-bound Rhiphaean plateaux
 He ranged, bewailing his lost Eurydice and the wasted
 Bounty of Death. In the end Thracian Bacchantes, flouted
 By his neglect, one night in the midst of their Master's revels
 Tore him limb from limb and scattered him over the land.
 But even then that head, plucked from the marble-pale
 Neck, and rolling down mid-stream on the river Hebrus —

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[Lines 493-523]